

SELF-HELP ONLINE WORKSHOP REGISTRATION

Superior Court of Monterey County

Litigants Gain Easier Access to Self-Help Services

Dealing with the government is not always easy, and it is particularly hard for Californians whose daily responsibilities allow them no flexibility to attend to personal business. The recent explosion in Internet availability, however, has created new opportunities for the courts to accommodate the public in ways that respect the realities of many people's lives.

Taking its cue from agencies such as the Department of Motor Vehicles, the Superior Court of Monterey County has, since June 2008, been permitting family law litigants to register for the court's self-help services simply by going to the court Web site, accessible at any time of the day or night. Litigants may register online for any of four self-help workshops—English and Spanish versions of a marriage dissolution workshop and English and Spanish versions of a workshop on child support, custody, and visitation.

Using the Web site, they also may make appointments with the court's self-help staff to review their documents to ensure that the paperwork is properly completed.

This online registration is especially welcome in Monterey, where many litigants had to drive as far as 65 miles to the main county courthouse so they could register at the self-help center during business hours. But in addition to saving litigants time and money, online signup is more efficient for the self-help staff. For example, staff can see at a glance if there's a month's wait to get into a particular workshop but another workshop isn't filling up. The staff can then realign the workshop schedule to meet the litigants' needs, instead of forcing litigants to adjust their own schedules.

About one in four workshop participants currently registers online, and this proportion has been increasing month by month. People who use the self-help center are told about the feature and are handed information

Online registration saves time for staff as well as workshop registrants, enabling staff to spend more time assisting litigants.



about registering online for future visits. Information about online registration is also given on the court’s Web site.

Users surveyed by the court rated the procedure favorably. “It is very easy to register, and I think it’s faster—you save time and they give you a confirmation number. I was very satisfied,” said litigant Miguel Morales.

Online registration currently is available only in English, but the court hopes to offer signups in Spanish in the future.

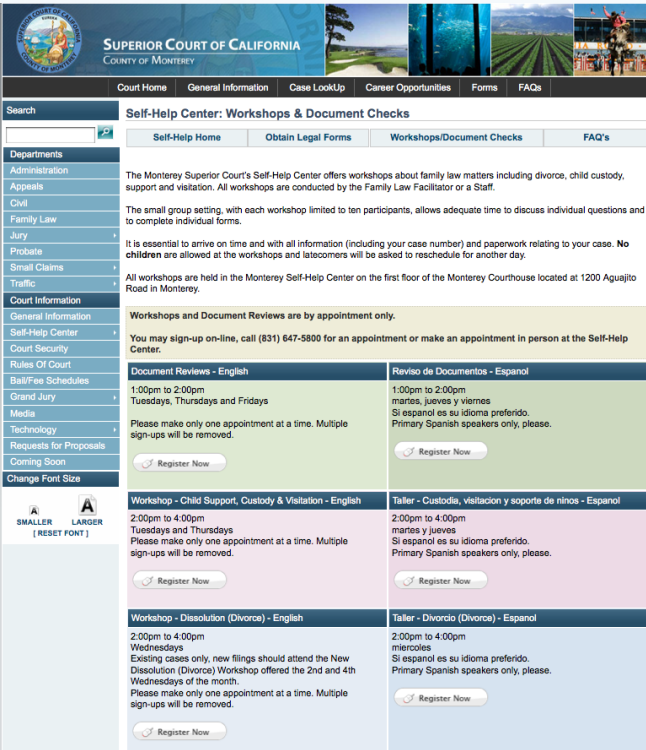
The startup cost for the program was about \$10,000 for programming and Web development.

“The program requires a great self-help center staff to create it and keep it up to date,” says Web administrator Eric Chavez.



Some Monterey County residents travel long distances to reach the main courthouse located in the City of Monterey, which has exclusive jurisdiction in family law matters.

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Online registration Web site.

TO REPLICATE THIS PROGRAM:

Contact the IT staff of the Superior Court of Monterey County. They are willing to assist other courts interested in replicating this project, which was created in less than two weeks. Mr. Chavez says, “The program requires low technical maintenance and involves minimal ongoing support costs. The module is easily transferred to any court that is standardized on a Microsoft platform.”